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Martina Balazova  
BBC Documentaries  
Room 5433  
White City  
201 Wood Lane  
London W12 7TS

Dear Ms. Balazova,

I was pleasantly surprised to receive your letter.

I am certainly glad someone is going to produce a documentary about W.W.II starting with Pearl harbor and prior to December 7th, 1941. It is difficult to realize that it all started almost 60 years ago. There have been many stories and books written about W.W.II, but sadly some are a little self-serving, we do have a History channel on TV, but their episodes are only about certain battles and much too brief.

I joined the U.S. Navy on August 13, 1940 and was discharged on August 13, 1946.

Yes, I was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 serving on-board the U.S.S. Oklahoma BB-37. I don't really know how many torpedoes hit the Oklahoma, some say as many as ten -- I wasn't counting. The ship rolled over about 151 degrees in about fifteen to twenty minutes.

Thirty-two men were rescued after the Oklahoma rolled over. I was one of those thirty-two. There were eight of us in the steering room aft (compartment D-63). This was my General Quarters station along with the other six Quartermasters. Thiesman, the Electrician, lived in another part of the ship.

The eight men in steering room aft (D-63) were:

*Boal, W.A.	Seaman 1st class
Jones, G.L.	Seaman 1st class
Bounds, J.C.	Seaman 1st class
*Ellis, A.L.	Seaman 1st class
Doling, G.A.	Seaman 1st class
Artley, R.L.	Seaman 1st class
*Kennedy, H.S.	Quartermaster 3rd class
Thiesman, I.S.	Electricians mate 1st class

\*Indicates those who are now deceased.

Compartment D-63 was also our living quarters. It was a rather large compartment containing not only lockers and bunks, but a binnacle, steering motors, condensers, four large wheels for hand steering and a small store room that was used by the senior Quartermaster.

Our first concern, after the ship rolled over, was water coming in through a fresh air duct. The air duct was about thirty inches in diameter. We still had auxiliary emergency lights for about 29 minutes after the ship rolled over. During that 29 minutes we stuffed a mattress and clothes into the air duct as tight as possible to stop the flow of water as best we could.

There was another compartment, D-66 (steering Gear Aft) directly aft of D-63 (steering Room Aft). Thiesman, the Electrician had a flashlight. We certainly made good use of his light -- while it lasted. There was one water tight door between D-63 and D-66. We looked in D-66 and found it to be completely dry. We decided to leave the door open, figuring that if, by some remote possibility someone tried to rescue us, it would take longer for two compartments (D-63 and D-66) to fill with water than just one. That was a smart decision on our part, as our options seemed limited -- we had no way out and apparently no tools to help set us free. We could have just as well tried to beat our way out of a bank vault with an over-ripe banana.

When the Arizona blew, it really shook our underwater compartment..

After the shooting seemed to abate we looked around and found an inspection plate at about the highest point in the compartment. It was through this inspection plate hole that we ultimately left the Oklahoma. The inspection plate was secured with 32 nuts and fortunately for us the wrench to remove the nuts was still in its hanger. I have thanked the Navy many times since for all the painting and repainting they demanded. It was all that paint that held the wrench in its place beside the inspection plate.

We assured and reassured ourselves that the Navy would try to effect a rescue if it was remotely possible. Lt. Comdr. W.M. Hobby, Jr., the 1st Lieutenant on the Oklahoma, was in charge of all rescue efforts. Julio De Castro, a shipyard lead man worked very closely with him. Comdr. Hobby had gone over to the Nevada, the sister ship of the Oklahoma and obtained the blue prints of the ship. This was very helpful, as both ships were identical except for small alterations made since they were first constructed.

Two of the men, Beal and DeLong had recently completed Q.M. school prior to joining the Oklahoma. They were familiar with Morse Code and they used the wrench we found beside the inspection plate to pound out, via code, that we were trapped and had no way out. I don't know how long it was before we started pounding out SOS or when they finally answered from the outside. When you are in a room or compartment that is totally dark and the water is slowly rising time becomes irrelevant. Oddly enough in the senior Quartermaster's office there were several dozen flash lights and lots of batteries, but we could not reach them.

There was not much to do, but wait and see if a rescue party was going to get us out. We prayed a lot, probably swore even more. We thought of all those things in our lives we shouldn't have done. And we thought about our families, our loved ones. It was agreed that any decisions would be made by vote with the majority ruling. I recall everyone remained fairly calm -- no panic among the eight men in D-63.

During the rescue attempts they first used torches to burn through the bulkheads. However, when they tried to cut into the first compartment the two men in it suffocated. I think their deaths were probably caused by smoke from the burning insulation. After that, the rescue party used chipping hammers and drills to cut through the rest of the bulkheads.

When the rescue crew finally got down to us, Julio DeCastro was on the other side of the inspection plate. He directed us to loosen all of the nuts on the inspection plate and when they were all finger loose to remove them as quickly as possible. That done, the inspection plate was knocked in and we were instructed to stiffen our bodies as we went through the opening to avoid being cut on the razor-sharp holes they had drilled. Although the edges had been wrapped with all kinds of material to prevent us from getting cut, they were still concerned we might panic, but that didn't happen. We realized later that had our rescue been delayed by 15 - 20 minutes the compartment would have completely filled with water.

When we emerged, instead of being on the deck, we were actually standing on the bottom of the ship. And to our surprise, instead of it being Sunday evening, as all eight of us assumed it was, it was Monday evening. We had been confined to Compartment D-63 from 8:00 a.m., Sunday, December 7, until 6:00 p.m., Monday, December 8.

I saw our division officer and asked about Daryle, my 21 year old brother, who was also serving on the Oklahoma. The officer said he would find out about him and let me know -- I never heard from him. I learned later that my brother, Daryle E. Artley (Quartermaster 2nd class), whose battle station was in the Control and Information Center (CIC) was killed that day, December 7, 1941. I have no idea how he died. His body was never recovered.

We were taken from the Oklahoma to the hospital ship, Solace, in a forty foot launch. Immediately we were escorted to a small compartment and within five minutes an officer showed up. First, he asked if any of us were hurt. I said I had a pretty good cut on my knee and he advised me to go to one of the many dispensaries on the ship, after I left there, and someone would bandage me up. The officer then asked if anyone would like a drink. I recall the response sounded like a unanimous "yes".

The only furniture in the compartment we were in was a gray, steel desk. The officer opened one of its drawers and brought out a fifth of whiskey and one glass. We queued up and one by one he poured about two fingers in the water glass. I don't remember who it was, but when it came to his turn he said, "Thank you, but I don't drink". Jim Bounds quickly spoke up and said, "Well, I'll take his and mine too".

Still dressed only in our shorts and very dirty and greasy from our ordeal, the officer told us to go down and have a good hot shower. I asked him where we could get some soap and towels. He replied, "Oh, there's always someone in the showers on this ship, I'm sure someone will give you some soap". After hitting the showers we were given some clothes and shown where we could sleep. We all gladly went to bed on the Solace; having then been without sleep for thirty-eight to forty hours.

The next day we were all assigned to the U.S.S. Helena, a light cruiser. The Helena had taken a torpedo, I can't remember just where. To the best of my recollection when the U.S.S. Pennsylvania came out of dry dock the Helena went in and they patched her up. We went back to the states on the Helena, and to the Navy yard at Vallejo, California (near San Francisco) for permanent repairs.

When I went aboard the Oklahoma in September 1940, Captain E.J. Foy was the Commanding Officer. Captain Foy was relieved by Captain Howard D. Bode two or three months before December 7, 1941. Capt. Bode was not aboard ship that Monday morning of December 7th. He went on to command the heavy cruiser Chicago. During the battle of Savo Island, near Guadal Canal on August 9, 1943, Capt. Bode took his ship away from the scene of the main action. No one knows why. Three U.S. cruisers and one Australian cruiser were sunk in that battle. Unfortunately Capt. Bode took his own life a short time later.

From a personal and political point of view, I think President Roosevelt and his entire cabinet failed miserably in leading this nation at a most critical time.

I have read many books about Pearl Harbor and all the questions of why and why not, the four that I think come close to telling it as it was are:

1. *At Dawn We Slept* by Gordon W. Prange
2. *Pear Harbor Final Judgement* by Major Henry E. Clausen
3. *Trapped at Pear Harbor* by Stephen Bower Young
4. *U.S.S. Oklahoma: Remembrance of a Great Lady* by Joe L. Todd

I do wish you and Mr. Lawrence Rees well in your endeavors to document World War II. It will be a formidable task.

Sincerely,

R. L. Artley

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